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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 001391

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN GOVERNOR UNSEATED BY ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL

Classified By: Consul General Brian Browne for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Following the Anambra State electoral tribunal's overturning of the 2003 gubernatorial election on August 12, the state's political climate continues to seethe. Electoral tribunal loser, current Governor Ngige had signalled his willingness to step down to aides of Governor-designate Obi. However, when Ngige and Obi met, the former performed a volte face and disclaimed a willingness to step down. Ngige swore to pursue his appeal, while Obi and All Peoples Grand Alliance (APGA) party national chairman Victor Umeh responded by hurling sharp public statements at Ngige. Meanwhile, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), perhaps spurred by the third protagonist in this enveloping drama Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) strongman Chris Uba, is also appealing the tribunal's verdict in hopes of calling a new election. The quadrille being played by Ngige, Obi, INEC, and Uba has begun to reheat Anambra, which has already experienced an unhealthy portion of political violence. We are advising all sides toward conciliation, the rule of law and for keeping verbal arrows in their quivers for the time being. End Summary.

2. (U) Immediately after the electoral tribunal threw out Anambra's 2003 gubernatorial election, governor Chris Ngige filed a twenty-two page appeal, listing twelve grounds, including lack of jurisdiction. Ngige hopes the appeal will reverse the tribunal decision, thus allowing him to keep his seat. INEC has joined the appeal, but INEC wants a new election. INEC may be acting in favor of Chris Uba, a PDP heavy and ally of President Obasanjo. Uba was formerly Ngige's patron, but the two have become mortal enemies and Uba has been after Ngige's position ever since.

3. (C) Over the August 27-28 weekend, Ngige met new APGA national chairman Victor Umeh. During this meeting, Ngige seemed conciliatory and suggested he was amenable to a settlement with Obi provided Ngige could remain "politically relevant," Umeh told the Consul General during their August 29 meeting. "Ngige has always wanted to be a senator, and we are willing to offer this to him for 2007," Umeh told the Consul General. Because of Ngige's apparent flexibility, Umeh arranged a meeting between Ngige and Obi.

4. (C) At the meeting with Obi, a different Ngige attended, lamented Umeh. Seeing Obi was like casting the red flag before a wounded bull, Umeh recounted. Instead of speaking about a settlement, an animated Ngige asserted he had discovered additional grounds for appeal, that he would win the appeal and would not entertain any thought of political compromise. At that point, both Obi and Umeh erupted, and the meeting quickly turned vituperative and ended frostily. Obi and Umeh carried the spirit of the meeting with them in their most recent press encounters where they literally excoriated Ngige. Ngige has publicly returned the insults.

5. (C) During his conversation with the Consul General, Umeh feared the failed meeting between Obi and Ngige would provide space that Chris Uba might exploit. At the end of the day, Obi and Ngige have more in common than either of them with Uba who wants to politically obliterate both from Anambra. Umeh said that he would try to bring envoys of Obi and Ngige back together to see if they can pick up the shattered glass from the meeting of their principals. If the relationship between Obi and Ngige were allowed to degenerate and if Uba tried to wedge himself into the gap, Anambra would spit into three strong competing camps. Political violence would be a near certain, Umeh feared. At that point, the Consul General counselled patience, further dialogue and respect for the rule of law. He also stressed the need for the major players to holster their tongues in public lest their statements inflame followers to commit acts no responsible person wants to see.

Comment

6. (C) Anambra is uneasily quiet for now. However, the state is roiling under the surface. Both Obi and Ngige will have to show greater restraint and statesmanship for Anambra to remain at ease during the period. Notwithstanding the court battle, Obi and Ngige could possibly strike a deal -- after all, Ngige needs a party to belong to if he is going to

play politics in 2007. He cannot return to the PDP. Obi's APGA is the only real alternative in Anambra. Moreover, both men have to be looking over their shoulders at Chris Uba. If they reach an accord, it could pacify Anambra politics. If not, expect another round of tension and more in Anambra.
End Comment.
BROWNE